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## Abstract

We are living amidst a global transformation in which neoliberal policies have created a precarious existence for various individuals and groups, including migrants around the globe. Precarity as a concept has become progressively widespread for making sense of the insecurities stemming from neoliberal policies, especially, flexible employment, ongoing decrease of welfare protection, and finding market solutions to social problems. Using an ethnographic approach, this paper aims to explore how Iranians in the UK overcome precarity. We found that precarity forces Iranians to confront their situation by considering their specific social experiences. Joining various transnational activities and networks, using transnational communication media, migrants convert their self-awareness into a strategy in order to overcome marginality.

Key words: precarity, transnationalism, Iranian diaspora, globalisation.

## Introduction

Neoliberal policies have intensified social inequalities and the emergence of a new class of insecure people commonly known as the precariat (Standing, 2011). The precariat is a consequence of neo liberalism and globalisation, which emphasizes flexibility of labour markets, lack of secure employment, accompanied by erosion of cooperation and moral consensus, and dwindling trust in human relations, especially in the work place (Standing, 2011). For Standing, cutting back social welfare programmes undermine the trust in communities and institutions. Once caught in its trap, it is extremely difficult to escape from a precarious position with little community and state benefit support where community spirit and the importance of work are crumbling (Sennett, 1998). Precarious labour market influences negatively on those living at the margin of society receiving social support benefits in terms of time and income as well as their expectations and demands (Shukaitis, 2013). The aim of this paper is not to challenge Standing's overall thesis, but to criticize his

treatment of denizen, in this case migrants and refugees, using an empirical investigation of transnational practices of the Iranians. To this end, we argue that Precarity compels migrants to take initiative and do something about their situation by reflecting on their distinct social experiences, therefore turning their self-awareness into a strategy to overcome exclusion (Bourdieu, 1999). In doing so they join various transnational networks. We first explore briefly the key concepts of precarity, transnationalism, social networks, and social capital, and then we examine transnational economic, political and sociocultural activities of the Iranians. According to 2011 Census, there were 82,000 Iranians living in Britain (Census, 2011), undoubtedly their numbers are much higher in 2018 as the UK remains the most popular destination for many Iranians. In 2010 and 2011, Iranians topped the number of asylum applications accounting for 13% of the total (Farsight, 2016). In 2013, Iran produced the second largest number of applications for asylum in the UK whilst in 2014 Iran ranked fourth highest accounting for 8.1% of the total number of applicants (Farsight, 2016). The Iranians are mainly concentrated in London, Manchester, Leeds, and Bradford.

### **Precarity**

According to Standing (2014), we are in the middle of a global transformation, experiencing the construction of a global market economy. The opening of markets and the growing intellectual property rights has resulted in concentration of the majority of income in the pocket of a small minority, whilst at the same time the labour supply has quadrupled. This has resulted in downward pressure on wages in advanced economies, with little prospect of rising in the near future (Standing, 2014). In the midst of the growing inequalities, a new class structure is in the making, the precariat, consisting of millions of people who have learned to live with instability (Standing, 2014). This is evident in changing labour relations and existential insecurity, steadily losing social, cultural, economic, and political rights, with

ever increasing insecurity, living on the brink of unsustainable debt, and a lack of trust in existing political parties for failing to represent their interests (Standing, 2014).

The Precariat is divided into three groups, first, atavist (people with no higher education qualification). Second, traditional denizens (i.e. migrants, refugees, gypsies). This group has a sense of nostalgia, comparing their current situation with the home but continue with their life quietly, despite the growing uncertainty around them (Standing, 2014). The third group, consists of the educated people with university degrees but no future, debt is the only certain thing for their future, 'in sum we can say that the first part of the precariat experiences deprivation relative to a real or imagined past, the second relative to an absent present, an absent 'home', and the third relates to a feeling of having no future' (Standing, 2014, pp. 30-31). Beneath the precariat is the lumpenproletariat.

We would argue that migrants and refugees are no strangers to precarity. For some their precarious situation had started well before their migration journey. Indeed, precarity is not a single phenomenon associated with globalisation, but has a longer history in the Global South (Scully, 2016). However, what Standing has missed is that living with uncertainty enables individuals to become proactive, draw on their resources, such as support of family and friends, etc., and utilize their networks as a form of social capital. Studying middle class migrants in Rotterdam Snell et al. (2016) found a relationship between experience of discrimination and transnational activities amongst the migrants. This comes as no surprise that perceived discrimination and social exclusion often result in heightened in-group identifications and attachments. When migrants feel rejected by their hosts, they are inclined to turn to their own communities and enclaves (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Snell, et al., 2016).

### **Transnationalism**

Basch et al. (1994, p. 7) define transnationalism as; 'the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and

settlement'. Transnationalism is characterized by increasing disjuncture between territory, identity and collective social movements, and belonging to an enduring transnational network that embraces the homeland, not as something simply deserted, but as a site of attachment (Clifford, 1994; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999). This refers to an adjustment to changing circumstances across borders (Ley, 2013).

Transnationalism as a concept has grown in various forms in the literature such as 'social morphology, as type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural reproduction, as avenue of capital, as site of political engagement, and as (re)construction of place or locality' (Vertovec, 2009, p. 4). However, we would argue that the scholars of transnationalism largely failed to understand transnationalism as a strategy for dealing with precarity; 'transnational social fields are networks of networks that link individuals directly or indirectly to institutions located in more than one nation state' (Glick Shiller, 2010, p. 112). Transnational field is made up of numerous overlapping fields of social relations, such as religion, politics, employment, enterprise etc., which are the diverse social environments whereby migrants define and reproduce their cultural orientations, and compete for distribution of resources (Gaventa, 2003). It is a network of cultural, economic, and other forms of relationships (Navarro, 2006), the context of which determines individuals' power and influence (Gaventa, 2003).

Processes of immigration and migration are risky and fraught with uncertainties; immigrants often live with status insecurity because of the complicate laws and regulations, and feel that the existing country of residence is not a permanent home (leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). Third world immigrants often are concentrated in low paid jobs and experience discrimination because their phenotypical or cultural traits are being barred from full integration (Sassen, 1998). These tough conditions encourage migrants to utilize their transnational networks in pursuit of alternatives (Guarzino, et al., 2003). Facing these

conditions, transnationalism provides a feasible alternative to side step national labour markets constraints, and local prejudice. The economic resources created by transnational enterprises create economic opportunities for their members, and enable them to resist exploitation and move upward, occupying a middle-class position in the host country (Portes, 2001). Globalisation is responsible for insecure employment in various forms, such as casual, short and temporary contracts, therefore exposing individuals and institutions to ever-risky conditions, and helping reflexive individuals to create transnational communities of interest beyond the borders of nation states (Beck, 2000). De-territorialization creates a huge demand for de-territorialized groups to contact their homelands, and these invented homelands represent the mediascapes of these groups (Appadurai; 2000). In order to understand transnationalism, it is important to consider the following conceptual tools, social networks, social capital, and forms and conditions of their embeddedness (Vertovec, 2009). We use the term social embeddedness to refer to people's participation in various transnational activities and groups, and their orientations towards and engagement with such activities and collectivities.

### **Social networks and Social capital**

‘A social network is a category of actors bound by a process of interaction among themselves... a social network or its parts are endowed with the potential of being transformed into a social group’ (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2011, P. 3). Social networks are important players in migration process. They shape and influence immigrant's choices to migrate, the country of destination, the available opportunities and future prospects, and integration and adaptation in the host country (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). Migrants use their social networks, which are a set of social relationships that span political borders and are created by immigrants in pursuit of economic development and social recognition, through

their networks; migrants are able to help future migrants as well as network members in the home country (Taylor, 2016).

Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to lead lives. Participants are bilingual, move easily between cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both (Portes, 1997, p. 812).

Social capital refers to the capacity to mobilize networks and social relationships in order to find jobs, economic gain or social prestige whilst creating reciprocity and trust (Putnam, 1995). Immigrants in their habitus embrace a set of cultural dispositions, which gives them certain distinctive taste and life styles, and certain outlooks towards the world around them. Habitus 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period' (Navarro, 2006, p. 16). Members of diaspora are not limited by the nation states in which they reside, but they maintain active cultural and political connections both nationally and transnationally using various media (Morley, 2000; Cohen, 2008).

Castells (1996, 1997) observes that new technologies are central to transnational networks and reinforce them. Different types of communication media and various technologies are regularly used simultaneously. Members of diaspora have used information communication technology (ICT) innovatively to create situations of co-presence with their family and friends in transnational spaces (Nedelcu, 2012). ICT helps to revive transnational family relationships and practices by connecting diasporas longing for closeness and wanting to care from a distance, with the continuing negotiation of family norms and members to the desire for self-determination (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016).

## **Method**

In order to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, it was necessary to employ an ethnographic approach using both physical and virtual spaces.

Francisco-Menchavez (in this volume) suggests that multi-sited ethnography and migrant

epistemology is a powerful methodology for researching precarity because the method mirrors the social realities of migrants who live abroad and their families who stay behind. An ethnographic approach enables the researcher to use variety of methods, because the aim is to grasp the natural processes of social action and interaction, collecting data without creating artificial situations with minimum of disruption by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Some empirical findings and statements of this report are based on interviews with Iranians in Britain. In total 15 unstructured interviews were conducted using a snowball sampling technique, which is “useful for hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify populations for which there is no sampling frame, but the members of which are somewhat interconnected” (Schutt, 2011, p. 157). Initially, three participants from Manchester were known to the researcher who then in turn helped the researcher to identify additional participants. The participants from Iran were all known to the researcher. The majority of informants were educated to degree level and above. Their age ranged from 21 to 60. The number of years living in diaspora ranged from 4 to 40 years. The participants experienced precarity related to income security, guaranteed employment, prospects for training and upward mobility, protection against dismissal, temporary and casual work, reduction or lack of employer contributions to pension schemes. For some precarity also involved precariat social position whilst for the non-citizens possibility of removal emphasizing precarious legal status, for others precarity was related to exclusion and isolation, linked to limited material and psychological wellbeing. The main criteria for inclusion in the study was experience of engagement with transnational networks, watching satellite TV, and online media usage. The researcher also interacted with six Iranians living in Iran in order to understand how encounters with members of diaspora and transnational networks influenced them.

Please see Table 1



Iranians are very active users of the Internet, and grasp the possibilities, which it has to offer (Ghorashi & Boersma, 2009; Graham & Khosravi, 2002). Therefore, it was paramount to adopt a style commonly known as virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000). In addition, partial content analysis of periodicals, television and radio programs, internet sites, and blogs were conducted. Copies of Keyhan London newspaper between 2002 and 2003 were also analysed. Keyhan London was established in 1984 with the aim of connecting scattered diasporic Iranian communities around the world, informing them about the life, politics, and whatever related to Iran. Keyhan has been an important newspaper ever since because of its longevity, and for the identification of transnational activities amongst the Iranians prior to the wide spread availability, and accessibility of the Internet. In addition, we analysed information from diverse internet sources, and online media including e-journals such as Iranian.com and Pars Times. The methodological approach adapted by the current study enabled the researcher to explore the Iranian diasporic connections, and place them in space of transnational networks through which diasporic community and networks meet.

### ***Social Media Usage***

Transnational migrant communities have been quick to incorporate social media into their communication channels, which in turn has transformed the nature of migrant networks (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). In spite of being relatively new diaspora, the transnational pursuits of Iranians both online and offline is significant (Alavi, 2005, Graham & Khosravi; 2002, McAuliffe, 2007, Spellman, 2004, Sreberny, 2000). The Iranian diaspora has been able to exploit this. For example, Twitter has been used for distributing short messages to a section of audience whilst the YouTube has been used to post videos, including films, music, lectures, interviews, football and other significant sporting competitions. Other social media types include blogs, collaborative projects, virtual games, social networking sites, and content

communities. The users of social media unite through shared hobbies and interests (Anderson & Bernoff, 2010).

Blogging has become popular amongst the Iranians both inside and outside Iran. ‘Farsi is the world’s fourth most popular blogging language’ (Alinejad, 2011, p. 44). Iranians use blogs to make personal diaries, make commentaries, and to communicate information whilst enabling the readers to make comments and interact with the author.

I started learning English since I was a child and few years ago I decided to start writing an English blog just and just to improve my English, then, after I started writing I found out I was expressing things that made my mind busy, mostly about politics, society, my inside thoughts and opinions, things like this. I also got lots of encouraging emails from different countries, so I liked blogging and kept doing it till now (Iranian Blogger living in Iran).

### ***Ethnic Media***

‘Ethnic media are media produced for a particular ethnic community’ (Matsaganis, et al., 2011, p. 5). These include newspapers, magazines, radio stations, televisions channels, cable and satellite networks, and the Internet for distribution (Karim, 2002). The role of ethnic media in reaching out to global diaspora is on the increase. Ethnic media has a paradoxical character. On the one hand ethnic media act as a vehicle for social control, encouraging the need for the maintenance of culture, and on the other, it facilitates the adjustment of the individual to the host society. Ethnic media connects diaspora to news and events in the home country, whilst helping arrivals to navigate and find their bearings in their new community and country (Adoni et al., 2006; Couldry, 2012; Stevenson, 2003). This has become more accessible and rapid because of the recent communication technologies. Those who are able to connect to their new environment and orient themselves are able to utilize a dual frame of reference by drawing on norms and cultural rules in more than one country (Reese, 2001).

### ***The Iranian Press: Evidence of Transnationalism.***

The Ethnic press has been an important instrument in distributing information about life in foreign lands and integration into host societies (Vellon, 2014; Viswanath & Arora, 2000). The researcher found 55 Iranian newspapers in America, out of which 22 are available online; 17 in Canada, 34 in Europe, 21 in Scandinavia, also one in China, Japan and Malaysia. They cover world news, entertainment, art, sports, cultural & social events, politics, etc. Looking at some of the advertisements in the Iranian press can provide us with some indication of the organization of the community. There were also special magazines for women, children, and professional groups.

Pages of Iranian media prior to the launch of the Facebook in 2004, was dedicated to those individuals trying to reunite with lost relatives and friends across diaspora, wanting to communicate with the like-minded people, and those looking for a marriage spouse. Thanks to Facebook, and other social networking sites with massive global reach, Iranians have been able to connect and find their friends and relatives.

I lost contact with my dear high school friend who after graduating from high school left for France to continue her education. After 40 years of not hearing from her and not knowing where she was or what she was doing, I managed to find her on Facebook and it was fantastic to be able to hear from her (Shaheen, female 59 living in Iran).

### ***Satellite Broadcasting***

Direct Broadcasting Satellites have released ethnic media from the constraints and restrictions imposed previously by national broadcasting regulators, and as such, has enabled diasporic communities to maintain active links with their members, therefore, helping to create cosmopolitan democracy (Karim, 2002). Transnational television is popular for both audiences inside and outside Iran. Family members across border who watch similar programmes, talk about them when interacting via Skype, Viber, Tango, and similar instant messaging and voice over IPs, as well as Facebook.

My sister and I talk about TV episodes online, especially the series we both watch. A year ago while visiting Iran, she became interested in watching this TV series, broadcasted by Iranian satellite TV. The series was made in Turkey but dubbed into Farsi. After she returned back to the UK she continued to watch the series, and we would talk about it online with much enthusiasm. If she missed an episode, she would receive updates from me (Nadia female 42 living in Iran).

Iranians have created a zone of emotional proximity amidst physical distance where ordinary pre-migration interactions and exchanges take place. These TV stations dedicate ample time to advertising where Iranian products and services are introduced to Iranians worldwide, in addition to ways of ordering and receiving those goods and products, consequently helping Iranian entrepreneurs globally. 'For the ideas and images produced by mass media often are only partial guides to the goods and experiences that deterritorialized populations transfer to one another' (Appadurai; 2000, p. 327).

I watch Iranian TV because it makes me feel at home. This is a kind of being able to place yourself in something familiar. Something inside you make you crave for hearing your native language (Mehri, female 42 Manchester).

Watching Iranian television is like opening a window into your life. It only improves your daily life because you can engage with your mother tongue and some aspects of your culture such as music, food, religion, and not feeling cut off from your roots (Sarah, female 35 Manchester).

We are not isolating ourselves from the mainstream culture because we like to watch satellite TV. Farsi programs are appealing to my wife and me but not so much to my teenage children, who were born and bred in this country. We also watch local programs in order to have a better understanding of the culture of our adopted country to be able to understand our children better and their needs and the challenges that they face (Masoud, male 54 Manchester).

### ***Ethnic Radio Broadcast***

The diverse political stance, accessibility and long broadcast hours, has made radio programs central to diaspora media (Georgiou, 2006, 2005; Tsagarousianou, 2002).

Programmes typically include news, commentary, poetry, music, adverts and interviews.

Radio call in programmes enable members of diaspora to voice their concerns, share their strategies of negotiating belonging, whilst resisting assimilation, by getting involved in discussions about social and political issues related to home and host societies.

The Farsi radio broadcasts has a very positive impact on the lives of the Iranians both inside and outside Iran. It provides the listeners with both local and international news, whilst entertaining them with music, and cultural and historical programs etc. The radio is a good companion for those who live abroad, and cannot speak the language of their host very well. It helps them to fill their time and not to feel lonely (Farhad, male 60 Manchester).

### ***Music***

Ethnic music is one of the earliest and popular form of diasporic communication that facilitates the preservation of cultural heritage, recollection of popular memory, and integration into culture of new society, therefore strengthening group identity (Boura 2006; Brennan, 2012; Erol, 2012). The music production takes place both in Iran and outside. The Iranian diaspora import mostly classical music, and export pop and other forms to Iran. Iranian singers both inside and outside Iran are invited to perform for members of diaspora in various countries. These concerts are highly popular.

Music is not detached from identity, individual and collective memory. It has powerful, emotive meanings, that and can be used to affirm and negotiate identity in a remarkably compelling fashion (Baily & Collyer, 2006). Music also connects diaspora with their past as [music] ‘give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work’ (Lomax, 1959, p. 929).

Diaspora use music in innovative and enriching ways, creating new forms in order to recreate their past culture in order to remind themselves of the place they have left behind. This is characteristic of the challenges encountered in new society, and the ways in which they are dealing with a new life in a place of settlement, such as the formulation of new identities. Music encourages creolisation because it is not so much dependent on lyrics or particular cultural or historical referent (Cohen & Kennedy, 2013). ‘Iranians love music and [our] society runs musical nights every month and ... we have a gala music night every year’ (Reza, male 21 London). ‘London's Iranian community was out in force last night. It was a gala concert

by pop diva Googoosh, a night of figure-hugging dresses, high heels and mirror balls' (London Evening Standard, 2013).

***On-Line Media: Connecting members of the community around the world.***

Iranians in diaspora have utilized the immense opportunities that on-line services such as the Internet and the World Wide Web offer (Alavi, 2005, Graham & Khosravi; 2002). Online newspapers bring unique advantages to Iranians in diaspora, and greatly enhance global connectivity. Many web sites have chat rooms that enable users to voice their opinions and enter into discussion with others who share the same interest. Discussions vary, and topics include literature, culture, politics, nationalism, etc. These virtual communities allow their members to communicate with users with common interests around the world; therefore sharing a symbolic universe where the user creates a 'place' that theoretically reconstitutes the pre-migration relationships. For instance, 'Iranian in Belgium' is an online community that provides news and information for Iranians in Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Iran in the Persian language. The website functions as a contact point between Belgian, Dutch, Luxembourgers and Iranian communities, organizations, journalists, travellers, students, etc. On average, the website has 10,000 visitors every day, almost five hundred thousand every month. The website aims to assist Iranians with integration to Belgian, Dutch or Luxembourgers' society.

People come from a variety of backgrounds and have multiple loyalties. The online media brings this diverse population together and opens various channels of communication. These communication channels need to be strengthened because they foster openness, dialogue, and tolerance, which are essential for democracy (Zara, female, 37 Bradford).

The online media has brought the Iranians closer. It has made the world a smaller place, and has enabled Iranians to network, and cooperate in various ways with their fellow countrypersons around the world (Payam, male 28 Manchester).

Online media helps diasporic subjects to develop a sense of belonging with their fellow country persons without physical contact (Ogan & Cagiltay, 2006, Tsagarousianou, 2004). In

addition, members of diaspora use media in order to keep up with their cultural and religious traditions, start new social contacts, and to consume a plethora of both material and non-material products from their homeland (Karim & Karim, 2003). Some members of diasporic communities who experience isolation and exclusion tend to join distant communities (Georgiou, 2013).

### ***Meet up Groups***

Meet up groups can provide a reassuring space for social participation and exchange, allowing members to find and join groups unified by a common interest, such as politics, books, food, games, movies, health, careers or hobbies. These meet up groups provide their members with an opportunity to network and feel part of a community (Bankston, 2014). The researcher has located forty meet up groups in five countries, and thirty-one cities, with total members almost 8000, and associate members numbering almost 4000. These networking occasions provide opportunities for finding jobs, friendship, partnerships, and socialization;

At the first days of winter, one travel agent whom I had met in one of the meet up groups invited me to work for him. After couple of weeks, I started working for him, that was new and existing experience for me. I changed many things in the agency: making new brochures, changing the windows of agency, making some new and enjoyable rules, arranging some interesting tours (Samira, female 25 London).

Social networks channel workers into jobs by matching workers and employers, often more effectively than formal recruitment mechanisms. The more contacts and associates increases the likelihood of receiving information about an available job (Munshi, 2003). Migrants are able to mobilize social capital from their networks in order to find better jobs, converting social capital into economic capital (Engbersen, et al., 2006).

There are various employment opportunities within the migrant economy including; accounting and finance, beauty salons, art galleries, bookstores, carpet and rug galleries. In addition, there are computer sales and services, currency exchange, dance and music, and education classes. There are import and export services, immigration and visa services, insurance agencies, jewelleries, medical and health services, mortgage specialists, online shopping stores, pharmacies, photography, real state, mortgage specialists, satellite and TV, restaurants and takeaways, legal services, supermarket and convenience stores, telecommunications, translation services, travel agencies and much more.

### ***Remittances***

Transnational activities of some Iranians on the personal level include transfer of money to family members. The average migrant from Iran remits back \$818.2 from the U.K and \$871.9 from the USA (Times labs, 2015). Migrants often remit money for altruistic reasons, because they care about their fellow country persons, relatives and friends (Anwar and Mughal, 2012; Fonchamnyo, 2012). Migrants remit because of commitment and responsibility towards their family members (Le De et al., 2016).

I started sending money home after my younger brother who is married with two children went into bankruptcy; he was desperately in need of financial support. My siblings also contributed, and he managed to eventually find a job and get back on his feet again (Sohail, male 52).

However, for others, sending money back is purely a matter of self-interest, because the individual intends to buy a house, invest in a business, or deposit money in a saving account with relatively high interest rate.

I was encouraged by my family to open a bank account in order to take advantage of favourable interest rates. In addition, you could receive interest on top of the interest already accumulated. This was an ideal investment opportunity without having to work hard and taking on risks associated with business in current unstable global economy (Hashem, male 56 Manchester).



### ***Sending and receiving goods to and from the country of origin***

Iranians typically send gift parcels for family members using postal services, or hand in a small parcel to a relative or a friend who is travelling to Iran. When visiting Iran, they take with them suitcases filled with presents for extended family members, and on their return, carry gifts with them given to them by members of the family. Giving gift is a symbol of personal and social relationship and ties that help to bond individuals together, symbolising moral support for distant relatives, strengthening family feelings of togetherness (Gowricharn, 2017).

I really look forward to visit my family every summer. I love to spoil them with presents. This is not easy, believe me, it is a real headache to try to buy things for so many people. I keep asking myself would they like the style, would it fit them etc. I start buying items couple of months before I travel, making several visits every week to various shopping centres (Mahnaz, female 34 Manchester).

### ***Investment in real state***

Migrants through investment in real estate, amongst other factors, contribute to development of their country of origin (Dutia, 2012). Buying property in country of origin reflects closer bonds to one's birthplace. Iranians who earn better income, or are able to save money, show great interest in buying houses or apartments. They are often encouraged by their family members and their own awareness of the economic and political conditions in the country of origin to invest in real state as both investment. This means that they will own a place for when they decide to return due to either retirement or changing economic and political conditions in the host country. Investment in real state is an indicator of growing transnationalism amongst Iranians.

We used to stay with family members during holidays, and then we decided to buy our own apartment gradually. We can visit anytime we wish and stay in our own place and visit our family.... It has also been a good investment because of considerable capital gain (Saeed, male 58 London).

### ***Charity giving***

Diaspora offering charity is not a new phenomenon, recent technological revolutions have enabled donors to support projects in their country of origin easier and faster (Johnson, 2007, Newland et al., 2010). With the view to mobilizing fundraising, charities have utilised a mixture of online and offline activities using websites, journals and satellite TV programmes that inform Iranians about charitable projects. Some informants regularly donate money to charities both in the host and home countries. The combination of religion and humanism inspire Muslims to help the needy regardless of place and geography (Erdal & Borchgrevink, 2017).

You can change a child's life by sponsoring him/her and move him/her out of poverty and exploitation. You can support their education, providing a foundation for achieving better social and economic existence in the future (Leyla, female 58 Manchester).

### ***Business ventures in the country of origin***

Immigrant entrepreneurship and investments are often viewed as engine of economic development and social and economic change (Ojo & Nwankwo, 2017). These entrepreneurs are frequently migrants who reside outside their country of origin, but are involved in transnational economic activities in more than one country. Governments around the world aim to entice skills and financial investment of their diaspora (Stasiulis, 2008). The Iranian government, for example, is exploring the possibilities of attracting members of diaspora and expatriates to invest in Iranian economy by devising a series of incentives to attract them.

The government is planning to absorb \$30 Billion of Iranian expat capital for implementation of economic projects and investment across the country, 'Deputy Labour Minister Abolhassan Firouzabadi says. Experts at the Labour Ministry, he said, are working out the mechanisms of how to implement the plan. Iranians abroad are holding very large sums of assets, which can be repatriated through generating trust and giving out necessary incentives to pave the way for their participation in grand economic projects', Firouzabadi said. There are an estimated four to five million Iranians living abroad with a net worth of around \$1.3 trillion. Their investments in the US, Europe, Turkey, Dubai, China and elsewhere amount to several hundred billion dollars each year but almost nothing in Iran (Press TV, 23/06/2017).

Migrant networks can facilitate trade, development, and investment. For example, migrant networks can create demand for importing goods produced by small and medium sized companies in their country of origin, hence linking the home country with the host.

### ***Political Participation***

Members of diaspora engage more with politics today compared with the past, and they are able to connect states and promote democracy both at home and abroad (Boccagni et al., 2016; Lafleur, 2013; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2015). Many Iranians keep in touch with politics of their country of origin by reading newspapers, watching news, listening to political commentaries, and voting in presidential election. In the recent presidential election, embassies of the Islamic Republic of Iran around the world, provided facilities for Iranians to take part in the election. Recently sending states have shown more interest and stronger desire to connect with their citizens' abroad (Lafleur, 2011).

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in London announced here that in order to facilitate the right of political participation of Iranian nationals in Iran's 12th Presidential Elections, it has scheduled to hold this election in London and six other major cities of the UK on May 19, 2017 concurrent with the election in Iran (IRNA, 04/05/2017).

Some Iranians also Participate in demonstrations related to country of origin;

Thousands attend free London screening of Iranian film in Trump Oscars protest. Asghar Farhadi, the Iranian director boycotting the Oscars over Donald Trump's travel ban, addressed a free London screening of his nominated film hours before the ceremony kicks off in Los Angeles. Thousands of fans gathered in Trafalgar Square to see Farhadi's *The Salesman*, nominated for the foreign-language film Oscar, at the open-air screening organised by London Mayor Sadiq Khan (inews, 23/08/2017).

### ***Diaspora Tourism***

Diaspora tourism appears in various shapes. It involves family visits (Uriely, 2010), heritage and faith tourism (Huang et al., 2016), medical tourism (Bookman & Bookman, 2007), business travel (Nurse, 2015) and 'birthright' tourism (Kelner, 2010) etc. However, irrespective of their intention, Iranians are willing to spend their money in the local economy more than international tourists are. Iranians know about their own country and know how to

get by without being charged extra. Diasporas can help with the promotion of tourism by opening markets for new tourist destinations in their country of origin, by either starting travel agencies in the host country, or working with established travel agents and tour operators.

Iran is a classic case of books and covers. It's hard to reconcile the country you've heard about on the news with a place where iPhone-toting locals carve up the Alborz piste, old women invite you in for a hot Chelow kebab and Tinder dominates the dating scene. Conservative and unconventional, deeply religious and deeply surprising, Iran tours don't fit into any easy pigeonhole. Which is kind of why we love them. Our local guides will show you all the highlights – the Golestan Palace, the Zoroastrian Fire Temple, Esfahan's bustling bazaars – but they'll also show you what it means to be a modern-day Iranian. And that's one thing you won't get from your average news bulletin (Interpidtravel).

### ***Visiting cultural events***

Cultural festivals and events play a fundamental part in the local representation of diaspora (Booth, 2016). Cultural organizations have long responded to the needs of Iranians in terms of their cultural traditions, such as festivals, celebrations, music, film, and art, including regional differences. These cultural events play a vital role in network building and the development of social capital (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). Events and festivals provide an opportunity, and a place, where individuals can come together as a community to share common sentiments and feel a sense of belonging. With over 300,000 Iranians living in Los Angeles, and more than 40,000 in London, it is no surprise that Persian culture is alive and kicking in major cities of Europe and North America. These thriving events take place in variety of places ranging from concert halls, stadiums, cafes, restaurants, and the function rooms of clubs and public houses. Established events like the Iranian Film Festival and Persian Theatre Festival are a fixture of London's cultural scene. Los Angeles and London are hubs for Iranian stars, singers, and performers. Some members of diaspora also attend

music concerts and theatre plays when visiting Iran. These enthusiasts are often informed individuals who know their stuff;

Tehran is blessed with a lively theatre scene. Some productions have received international commendation. The productions range from experimental performance pieces to passion plays, comedy, historical, tragedy, musical to artistic blends of the traditional and the modern as well as adaptation of contemporary and classical works of Westerners (Shahab, male 41 Leeds).

## **Conclusion**

Using an ethnographic approach, the aim of this paper was to show how migrants are able to deal with precarity by engaging in transnational networks, using transnational communication media. The concept of precarity indicates suffering as the result of failing social and economic networks of support (Butler, 2009). Nevertheless, for the Iranian diaspora, living under precarious conditions has resulted in awareness and appreciation of the fact that their social existence depends on interdependency and cooperation with others, always remembering that living amidst precarity calls for resourcefulness and creativity. Members of Iranian diaspora have responded by rejecting the very condition of living a precarious existence. Transnational connections and networks among the Iranian diaspora has been in the making for some time, resulting in greater transnational interaction with Iranians both in Iran and around the world. The Iranian diaspora has been active both online and offline exploring various opportunities in transnational spaces, enabling members to renegotiate their identities, and engage in political, literary, and other forms of discussion, whilst creating online and offline activities. The transnational communication networks amongst the Iranian diaspora imply that as a de-territorialized group, transnationalism is emerging as a site of engagement.

The revolution in information technology and the restructuring of capitalism have brought about a new form of society, a society which Castells (1996) calls the network society. The network society is characterized by the globalisation of economic activities, by

the networking forms of organizations, by flexibility and instability of work, by a culture of virtual reality constructed by a universal, interconnected, and diversified media system. Also by transforming the foundation of life, space and time, through the creation of never ending flows of activities and images across time and space.

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Table 1. Sample characteristics

Demographics of informants						
Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Educational level	Length of stay in the UK (years)	City	live in Iran
Leyla	F	58	A level	28	Manchester	
Saeed	M	58	Bsc	35	London	
Mahnaz	F	34	Bsc	15	Manchester	
Hashem	M	56	Msc	32	Manchester	
Samira	F	25	BA	12	London	
Payam	M	28	Msc	18	Manchester	
Zara	F	37	PhD	12	Bradford	
Reza	M	21	Bsc	11	London	
Farhad	M	60	HND	40	Manchester	
Masoud	M	54	Bsc	26	Manchester	
Sarah	F	35	Msc	12	Manchester	
Mehri	F	42	BA	24	Manchester	
Shahab	M	41	PhD	4	Leeds	
Hamid	M	33	Bsc	7	Manchester	
Sima	F	44	GCSE	9	Manchester	
Shaheen	F	59	BA			Iran
Mohsen	M	60	Bsc			Iran
Nader	M	32	Msc			Iran
Nadia	F	42	BA			Iran
Majid	M	25	Student			Iran
Nazi	F	26	BA			Iran